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Ireland under Mr. Balfour.

FIVE YEARS OF UNIONIST GOVERNMENT.

On Tuesday Evening, 23rd June, 1891, Mr. T. W. Russell, M.P., was the guest of the Liberal Union Club at the Criterion Restaurant, London. Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, M.P., presided. After thanking the Club for the great compliment paid him, Mr. Russell said :—

When I received and accepted your invitation for to-night, I had to think of what I should say. It is easy to talk the platitudes of politics. What I asked myself was, whether it would not be possible to say something which would be of use to the Members of this Club in the work they are doing all over the country. Looking at the matter in this light, I resolved to endeavour to do two things : first, to ask what had been the results of our action as a party in 1886 as regards Ireland ; and second, to make clear what we had lost and gained by the Unionist Alliance. We are nearing a General Election, when we shall be called upon to make answer on these two points, and I hope that which I am about to say, and the facts and figures I am about to quote, may prove useful beyond the confines of this room.

IRELAND IN 1885-86.

What then was the position in Ireland when the Unionist party came into power? It is quite true that there was a lull in Irish disorder between June, 1885, and June, 1886. The dates are full of significance. During the first part of that period the Conservative leaders were coquetting with Mr. Parnell, and, during the second, Mr. Gladstone had gone over, bag and baggage, to the man and the party he and his followers had previously denounced. During this period, therefore, Irish disorder was held in check. But with the advent of the Unionist party to power, the dogs of war were let loose once more. Agrarian crime at once began to increase. The plan of campaign was formulated. Juries disregarded their

oaths, and acquitted prisoners whose guilt was clearly established. Boycotting was extended and became an engine of savage and heartless cruelty. Evictions increased. Everything was, in fact, done to make Government impossible. This was the position of affairs shortly after the Government took office.

IRELAND IN 1891.

Let me give some figures illustrative of how things stood then, and how they stand now. For many months England rang with the story of Irish Evictions. They constituted the staple of Gladstonian oratory all over the country. At bye-elections they were made to do enormous service. Now we never hear of them. Why is this? Here are the figures.

EVICCTIONS.

Year.					Total of Actual Evictions.
1886	...	...	...	...	3781
1887	...	...	...	...	3869
1888	...	...	...	...	1609
1889	...	...	...	...	1356
1890	...	...	...	...	1421

These figures speak for themselves. They are official, and cannot be questioned, and they prove that, so far from the Unionist policy having encouraged or increased evictions, the passage of the Land Act of 1887, and the Crimes Act of the same year has reduced them by over 60 per cent.

AGRARIAN CRIME.

Agrarian crime has always been the special disorder of Ireland. We condemn it, and we do right. But we ought to remember (and the thought ought to make us not indeed tolerant of the crime, but anxious to find the remedy) that this evil tree sprang from a root of our own planting. It is a sad history the record of these three hundred years—the abolition of the old Irish land system under which tribal rights were acknowledged; the planting of Irish landlordism under the English system of tenure; the strife, the bloodshed, the misery which followed, and the wild revenge of secret societies, by means of which the peasantry sought to right their wrongs. It is a ghastly record—only lit up by the awakening of England in recent years to a sense of her duty and her obligations. But with all this I am only incidentally concerned to-night. The real question before us is, how has Ireland fared in this respect since 1886? I again quote the official figures.

Year.	Agrarian Crimes exclusive of threatening letters.		Threatening letters.		Total.
1886	...	632	...	424	1056
1887	...	591	...	292	883
1888	...	411	...	249	660
1889	...	341	...	194	535
1890	...	320	...	199	519

Here, again, there is absolutely no room for doubt. A solid reduction of 50 per cent. in this class of crime is something worth boasting about; and the decrease still goes on, the quarter ending 31st March of the present year showing a downward tendency, with only one single offence against the person.

BOYCOTTING.

This offence, in many respects the most heartless and cruel product of the Irish and Gladstonian conspiracy, assumed alarming proportions in 1886. Mr. Gladstone understood what it was, and denounced it in 1882. He invented the name of "Exclusive dealing" for it in 1887. But how much Ireland suffered, and how many people were hopelessly ruined by it, may be gathered from the official records:—

Date.	Persons wholly boycotted.		Partially boycotted.		Total.
30th June, 1887	...	866	...	4035	4901
31st Dec., 1887	...	287	...	2182	2469
" 1888	..	56	...	656	712
" 1889	...	2	...	150	152
" 1890	...	—	...	472	472
31st May, 1891	...	—	...	403	403

It will be seen by these figures that this evil was almost extinct in 1889, and that it revived in 1890. This was due entirely to the Tipperary struggle, now happily being brought to a close. And the significance of these returns will be seen when I mention the fact that out of the 403 persons partially boycotted at the present moment 312 live in the area still left under the full effect of the Crimes Act. In other words they are in County Clare, or on the Clanricarde, Smith-Barry, and Olphert estates. Outside of this area there are only 91 persons partially boycotted in the whole of Ireland. It is almost impossible for those who have not seen the working of this system of torture to realise what these figures mean.

THE PLAN OF CAMPAIGN.

The Plan of Campaign has for several years been the great weapon of the Parnellite and Gladstonian alliance. I am aware that now, when it is dead or dying, politicians of the type of Mr. Samuel Smith and Mr. Rathbone are making haste to declare that they never approved of it. But whilst Mr. O'Brien was shrieking its praises and defending its palpable dishonesty below the gangway, these gentlemen, with a great load of Welsh Nonconformity weighing down their consciences, were conveniently silent. What are the facts to-day regarding the Plan? Mr. O'Brien maintains that it has everywhere triumphed. Has it triumphed at Tipperary? There, on a great scale, involving probably an expenditure of £50,000, this scheme of dishonesty and insanity had a fair field. It was blessed by an archbishop, who, now that the whole edifice has come tumbling about his ears, mournfully tells his people that "Home Rule is dead," and that he at all events "will not live to see it." It was backed by a system of terrorism almost infernal in its completeness. It has absolutely failed. Mr. Smith-Barry has not been ruined. Tipperary has nearly been destroyed. Has it succeeded at Luggacurren, at Coolgreany, at Gweedore, at Dunleer, or at New Ross? The fact is the Plan of Campaign is on its last legs. It is not quite dead. But it is dying. And those "Children of the Nation," who, Mr. O'Brien was wont to assure us, would be taken care of by the Irish race so long as they had a shilling to spend or a crust to spare, are now being handed over to that broad-shouldered but on the whole kindly gentleman, the British tax-payer. A few weeks, or at most months, will probably see the last of this wild and insane policy.

THE CRIMES ACT.

Gentlemen, the Crimes Act constitutes the head and front of our offending. Coercion was not only doomed to failure, it was to sound our death knell as a party. Has it failed? So far from having failed, practically the whole of Ireland has been relieved from the provisions of that Second Section around which such fierce battles were fought in the House of Commons. But there are things so suggestive about the later history of this measure that I cannot refrain from mentioning them. I have two sets of figures—the first of which brings the working of the Act down to the end of 1890—the other to the end of April 1891. Here is the first:—

Period.	Total.	Discharged.	Convicted.
Prosecutions under Act to			
31st December, 1887	628	213	415
" " 1888	1,475	393	1,082
" " 1889	839	242	597
" " 1890	530	130	391

These figures are highly satisfactory. But they do not possess the same interest as the second set to which I have referred. I secured them in reply to a question in the House from the Chief Secretary for Ireland. The figures deal with the first four months of 1890 and 1891.

ULSTER.

FIRST PERIOD.

Courts Held.	Cases Tried.	Persons Tried.
9	9	42

SECOND PERIOD.

4	4	12
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LEINSTER.

FIRST PERIOD.

Courts Held.	Cases Tried.	Persons Tried.
6	6	27

SECOND PERIOD.

5	5	31
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MUNSTER.

FIRST PERIOD.

Courts Held.	Cases Tried.	Persons Tried.
33	33	136

SECOND PERIOD.

15	16	48
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CONNAUGHT.

Courts Held.	Cases Tried.	Persons Tried.

FIRST PERIOD.

23	24	48
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SECOND PERIOD.

7	8	10
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In the first period, the four months of 1890, there were 71 Crimes Courts held. In the second period there were 31. In the first period there were 72 cases tried. In the second there were 33. In the first period, the persons involved numbered 238. In the second, there were only 101.

These are most suggestive figures. What caused the drop of 65 per cent. ? The answer is plain. This class of crime requires incitement. It requires organization. It requires the incitement of vitriolic speech. It requires the organization of the paid organizer. No Irish peasant goes moonlighting out of sheer gaiety of heart. No. It requires organization, and oftentimes coercion. During the past six months, the vitriolic speech has been entirely absent from Ireland—or, if it has been heard at all, the patriots were fiercely denouncing each other to the neglect of what they call the common enemy. And as for the paid organizer—he, too, has felt the pinch. His weekly allowance has been stopped to the immense advantage of the country. This, and this alone, explains the collapse of this form of crime—a collapse which has enabled the Government not indeed to dispense with the Crimes Act sword, but to return it to its sheath.

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

And, finally on this head, the House of Commons attests the reality of the pacification of Ireland. We are nearing the close of one of the most memorable Sessions that any Parliament ever witnessed. It was heralded by a great flourish of Opposition trumpets. It has been a triumphant success. Ireland has secured a great measure, under which it will at least be possible for 100,000 tenants to become owners in fee of their holdings, and on terms such as no State in the world ever dreamed of giving. She has also secured, and will shortly be in the full enjoyment of, an extension of her railway system, such as few Irishmen ever contemplated. A period of want in the congested area has been successfully met. Education is to be freed and made compulsory, and a great measure of temperance reform has received the approval and support of the Government. But, whilst all this has been done, or is in process of being done, the change in the House of Commons is very great. Mr. O'Brien no longer shrieks below the gangway. Mr. Dillon's pensive face is not to be seen. Mr. Parnell flits in and out, but does not stay. Even Mr. Healy prefers his briefs in Dublin to his duties at Westminster, and Mr. Sexton is all that is left of the famous band. What things have come to may be realized when I say that an Irish member in my hearing lately gave utterance to an opinion that "the Chief Secretary was not utterly depraved." Things are sadly out of joint when an Irish debate empties the House—when members go about declaring that there is nothing to equal it in dulness, save, perhaps, a Scotch discussion on a Roads and Bridges Bill.

COMMERCIAL PROSPERITY.

But, Sir, we have not only secured a peaceful, we are rapidly approaching a prosperous Ireland. In 1886 there were 18,640,000 passengers travelled on Irish railways. In 1889-90 the number had risen to 20,293,000. In 1886 the goods traffic amounted to £1,270,000. In 1889-90 it had risen to £1,369,000. The Irish Banks tell the same story. The cash balances standing in these Banks at the close of 1886 amounted to £30,172,000. At the end of 1890 they stood at £33,325,000, whilst the balances at the end of both years in the Trustee and Post Office Savings Bank stood at £4,710,000 and £5,696,000 respectively. It does not really matter into what path the enquirer strikes, the result is the same. The population is diminishing. This is the stock cry of the Irish patriot everywhere. It is true, and the pity is that the exodus is not always from the congested area. But even here the balance is on the right side. During the five years ending 1885, 398,658 persons left Ireland for other countries. For the same period, 1886-90 the number was 335,817, a reduction of 16 per cent.

PAUPERISM.

If we turn to pauperism the figures are also satisfactory. The average number of paupers in Irish workhouses for the five years ending December, 1885, was 51,558. For the same period ending 31st December, 1890, the number was 46,110—a reduction of 11 per cent., whilst ordinary as distinct from agrarian crime has sunk to a lower figure than it has stood at for twenty years.

FIVE YEARS OF UNIONIST GOVERNMENT.

I hold, therefore, that in the face of the country we can give not only a good, but a triumphant account of our work in Ireland. It is almost an unbroken record of success. Others may claim the credit. Those who laboured to make Government impossible, who launched the Plan of Campaign, who have ruined whole districts and thousands of people, may say that these results are due to their action, that we have had no policy, save that of coercion. This will hardly deceive the ordinary British elector. We have, undoubtedly, coerced people. We have coerced the evil-doer. We have coerced the coercionist, and by our action real freedom has been restored to the country. And, whilst doing this, we have redressed wrongs, remedied grievances, and gone a long way towards solving the Irish Land Question, the real root of all the trouble in that country. Whether, therefore, we win or lose at the General Election, I am certain that the historian will do us justice, and that these five years of Unionist Government of Ireland will stand out as the most successful of modern times. (Cheers.)

FURTHER FACTS.

It is universally admitted that one of the surest indications of the prosperity of a country is the state of its commercial credit ; and the improvement in the condition of Ireland during the last five years cannot be better tested than by examining the value of the shares in her leading commercial securities. We give below a table showing the market value of the shares in the leading Irish banks, railways, and tramways at three different periods :—First, in January, 1886, before the introduction of Mr. Gladstone's Home Rule Bill ; secondly, in May, 1886, while that Bill was before Parliament, and its fate was uncertain ; and thirdly, at the present time, when a Unionist Government has been nearly five years in office, and the fears which were excited by the possibility of the establishment of an Irish Parliament have died away. We commend these figures, which are taken from the Stock Exchange quotations, to the attention of business men, who can appreciate their full significance :—

	1886 January	1886 May	1891 Dec.
Bank of Ireland Stock	271	260	326
Ulster Bank Shares (£2 10s. paid)	10 $\frac{5}{8}$	9 $\frac{1}{8}$	10 $\frac{1}{8}$
City of Dublin Steamship Company	113 $\frac{1}{2}$	110	121
Belfast and Northern Counties Railway, Ordinary	69 $\frac{3}{4}$	68	122 $\frac{1}{2}$
Belfast and Northern Counties Railway, Preference	98 $\frac{3}{4}$	93 $\frac{1}{2}$	116
Belfast and Northern Counties Railway, Debentures	105	101 $\frac{1}{2}$	120
Dublin, Wicklow and Wexford Railway, Ordinary	54 $\frac{1}{2}$	42 $\frac{1}{2}$	43
Dublin, Wicklow and Wexford Railway, Preference	100	99	126
Great Northern of Ireland Railway, Ordinary	103 $\frac{3}{4}$	95	131 $\frac{5}{8}$
Great Northern of Ireland Railway, Preference	104 $\frac{1}{2}$	101 $\frac{1}{2}$	131
Great Northern of Ireland Railway, Debentures	107 $\frac{1}{4}$	105	123
Great Southern and Western Railway, Ordinary	102 $\frac{1}{2}$	95	117 $\frac{3}{4}$
Midland Great Western Railway, Ordinary	68	61 $\frac{1}{4}$	105 $\frac{7}{8}$
Midland Great Western Railway, Preference	100	94	116
Midland Great Western Railway, Debentures	103	100 $\frac{1}{4}$	122 $\frac{3}{4}$
Dublin Street Tramways	11 $\frac{1}{16}$	10 $\frac{1}{16}$	15 $\frac{3}{4}$
Dublin United Tramways	10 $\frac{5}{8}$	10 $\frac{1}{16}$	10 $\frac{5}{8}$

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